

## Reclaiming our hopes

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Comment

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LAST Saturday was a memorable one for Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). As early as 8am on a Ramadan morning, hundreds of students and staff gathered around the iconic Tasik Harapan to collectively perform a simple gesture that would bring back the lake to life — not that the Tasik is lifeless, but it is not the way it was before.

More than a decade ago, a lake was created around one of USM students' residence, called Desasiswa Harapan, hence, the name Tasik Harapan, which acts as a retention pond to prevent floods. The Tasik, which was aesthetically conceived, also beautifies Desasiswa Harapan, which is privileged to have a view of the lake.

Apart from adding water elements to the campus surrounding, the lake also doubles as a place for kayaking, or doing a flying fox stunt as part of the students' recreational activities.

The USM Rowing Team also trains near the lake during its short-lived regatta days with University of Malaya.

Very soon the Tasik gained popularity, so too Desasiswa Harapan.



The lake quickly became a meeting place, especially in the evening for the campus crowd. Some jogged around it; some even picnicked while feeding the fish.

The lake is known for its quality marine life. Each time when it overflows during the rainy season, fish are found in the monsoon drain in and round campus. For many, this is a time for a good catch.

As the fish population multiplied, angling competitions were regularly held at a nominal fee.

It was a win-win-win event for the angler, the university and the remaining fish because overcrowding can cause undesirable effects on the lake.

And so it was, until one day, the lake became a pool of murky water dominated by algae. Dead fish were seen afloat.

The *biawak* (lizard) population is on the rise and makes Tasik Harapan its home. This is a turning point for Tasik Harapan that has served the university community well — leisurely and academically.

The biawak are a cause for concern. They have grown in size and look more like Commodore Lizards as they feed on food that some people throw into the lake.

Some even have the audacity to run after female passers-by! Clearly, the biawak are now the new overlords.

All earlier attempts to rehabilitate the lake using various technologies proven successful elsewhere have failed at USM. But the search for solutions continue. It is fast becoming a challenge to a university that prides itself on being "The University in a Garden".

So the gathering on Aug 21 was about meeting this obstacle to transform Tasik Harapan once again into the Lake of Hope.

This time, through a network called Friends of Tasik Harapan (<http://friendsoftasikharapan.blogspot.com/>) many of the campus community are showing their concern by participating in a meaningful way to restore the lake to its pristine state.

It is an initiative driven by the USM Alumni with support from CIMB Foundation, creating what is called The USM-CIMB Lake Clean-Up Initiative.

The project is done in partnership with Bioremediation Solutions Sdn Bhd and various schools and centres at the university to monitor the progress of the mudball technology. The project is research-based, befitting that of a university.

The expectation is no less than a change that is long overdue. In this case the transformation is not just about the lake but also about the campus community that has once again come together, especially those driven by students, to pledge their commitment to the environment. The university, CIMB and Bioremediation Solutions work as a team on the same mission.

This event — though small — resonates well with the collective culture of USM that must be shown in the days ahead when we celebrate the 53rd Merdeka with the theme 1Malaysia — Generating Transformation. Indeed, Friends of Tasik Harapan is doing just that!

This will be evident before the year is out when it transforms Tasik Harapan in a tribute to 1Malaysia.

In short, it is about reclaiming our hopes! To those who are committed to make this happen, we say: Kudos!

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